

THE



AUGUR

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OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BIBLICAL NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

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IT'S ABOUT TIME!

It's time for Biblical coins to be enjoyed by all, rather than studied by a few scholars. It's time for the public to bridge the gap over twenty centuries and to learn the true meaning of Biblical passages that would otherwise be obscure. And most of all, it's time for YOU to enjoy a hobby that will give you deep satisfaction . . . and that can be shared with your family and friends.

Welcome. We have tried to pack this first issue of THE AUGUR with articles of the broadest possible interest. We hope that you will find these tidbits of history brought vividly to life through the 2000 year old coins that the People of the Bible have left us as their heritage.

This premier issue represents what the founders of the Biblical Numismatic Society hope you want to read. Future issues will reflect your comments and ideas. Also, BNS members and others are invited to submit articles for THE AUGUR. This is not our publication . . . it is yours. We want to hear from you!

Mel Wacks NLG
Editor



The Ark of the Covenant (housing the two tablets of the Ten Commandments) portrayed on a large silver tetradrachm issued by Simon Bar Kochba (135 AD).

Coin of the Month

BAR KOCHBA'S "TEMPLE" MOTIF

In 132 AD, at the start of the Second Jewish Revolt against Roman domination, there was no Jewish Temple . . . no Temple Treasury . . . and no silver. But, it was of major importance to the freedom fighters to proclaim their independence with the issue of silver coins. Thus, they prepared new designs and dies, and gathered together the "foreign" Roman, Syrian and Phoenician coins then circulating in Judaea. The original designs were filed off the coins which were then restamped with Jewish symbols and Hebrew inscriptions that referred to the hope of rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. During Bar Kochba's three year rule, only his coins were considered legal tender in Judaea. Perhaps intentionally, portions of the original "foreign" designs could still be seen beneath the new Jewish devices . . . to serve as further insult to these mighty nations. This overstriking of coins of known quality (e.g. good silver) was in sharp contrast with other debased coinage which has often been characteristic of such emergency money.

The most impressive of Bar Kochba's coins is the large silver tetradrachm (called "sela" by the Jews) which features a tetrastyle (e.g. 4 columns) temple-like structure; the other side features symbols of the harvest festival of Succoth. In the center of the facade, where one might expect to find the image of a heathen god on a contemporary Roman coin, there is rather a squarish box with two small circles, all within an arched-rectangular area. The square is the Ark of the Covenant (presumably housing the two tablets of the Ten Commandments) and the two circles are the staves, so long that the "ends were seen out in the holy place before the inner sanctuary" (I Kings 8:8) of Solomon's Temple. The semicircular arch could represent "the cherubim (who) spread forth their two wings over the place of the ark" (I Kings 8:7), or perhaps the overall outline was meant to suggest the similarly shaped holy tablets themselves, as has been suggested by Alice Muehsam (COIN AND TEMPLE, 1966). Thus, we have as the central theme, the Holy of Holies that Bar Kochba hoped to rebuild. ➔

The Holy of Holies was entered only once each year by the High Priest on Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement). A more contemporary description of this "heart" of the Temple is given by the Roman-converted Jewish historian Josephus (c. 38–after 100 AD):

"Internally, dividing the Tabernacle's length into three portions, he (Moses) set up four pillars. The area within these pillars was the sanctuary, the rest of the tabernacle was open to the priests. The entire temple was called 'Holy (Place)', its inaccessible shrine within the four pillars the 'Holy of Holies.' Furthermore, there was made for God an ark with a length of five spans, and a breadth and height of three spans each; both within and without it was all in gold. (Note that a span was the distance between the tips of the little finger and thumb when extended which is about 7 inches for me—Ed.) To each of its longer sides were affixed two golden rings, penetrating the wood, and through these were passed gilt rods on either side, by means of which it might, when necessary, be carried on the march."

While the holy Ark of the Covenant made an ideal rallying point for Bar Kochba, actually it is believed that the ark had not been in the Holy of Holies for hundreds of years, possibly having been carried off to Babylonia during the exile (c. 597 BC). However, this fact may have only been known to the High Priests and a few others, with the general populace believing that the ark had been in Herod's Temple which had been destroyed in 70 AD.

The features of the four columns and two round staves can be seen on the tetradrachm, and they are even more prominently depicted on the Torah Shrine wall painting found at the Dura-Europos Synagogue, which dates back to the 2nd-3rd Century AD.

Another important feature of this coin design is the star in the upper field. It has 8 points; other coins of this type have 4 or 6 points. This is not the "Star of David" which became a Jewish symbol many centuries later. Rather, it

evidently alludes to the leader of the Second Revolt, Simon Bar Kochba, whose name meant "Son of the Star," derived from the Biblical prophesy, "There shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel" (Numbers 24:17). The ancient Hebrew inscription is the first name—Shimeon—of this Jewish hero, who was proclaimed the Messiah by the famous Rabbi Akiba.

The horizontal ladder-like pattern beneath the tetrastyle structure likely represents a wall that was thought to be in front of the Holy of Holies. Similar architectural configurations can be found on ancient Roman coins.

The 35 mm color photograph is by Dr. Emanuel Rubin. This tetradrachm was sold in 1966 by Bank Leu, Zurich for \$1135. It is coin type Wacks 101, Meshorer 199, Reifenberg 167. The grade is Extremely Fine, and there is only slight evidence of the original design-irregularities on the right-most column. A similar piece fetched \$2735 in the November 1976 auction held by Frank Sternberg, Zurich.



Torah Shrine wall painting
at the Dura-Europos Synagogue
(c. 2nd-3rd Century AD).

BIBLICAL NUMYSTERY NUMBER ONE

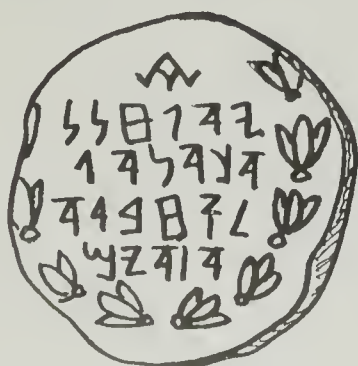
Even though scholars around the world have been researching ancient Biblical coins for hundreds of years, there remains an amazing number of unanswered questions. Since there are few secular records extant of that early historic period, we may never know the real facts behind some of these 2000 year old mysteries. But, it is still of interest to discuss various theories and to speculate for ourselves.

Some of the small Hasmonean bronze leptons (e.g. prutahs or mites) issued in the name of Yehochanan have the Greek letter "A" above the ancient Hebrew inscription; these are catalogued as Wacks 13, Meshorer 19, and Reifenberg 8.

De Saulcey writes in *RECHERCHES SUR LA NUMISMATIQUE JUDAÏQUE* (1854) that the "A" relates to an alliance between Jewish King John Hyrcanus (135-104 BC) and either Syrian King Antiochus VII Sidetes or Alexander II Zebina. H. J. Stein, writing in the *Numismatic Review* (1943) makes the suggestion that these coins were minted after the death of John Hyrcanus, and that the "A" stands for Judah Aristobulus, his brother.

Still another suggested solution points to a joint reign of Queen Salome Alexandra, widow of Alexander Jannaeus, and her son Jonathan Hyrcanus II who was appointed High Priest, in the period 78-69 BC. Or could the "A" refer to Antipater of Idumaea (father of Herod the Great), who allied himself with Jonathan Hyrcanus II in the brotherly dispute over the rightful king of Judaea? Emil Schurer writes in *A HISTORY OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE IN THE TIME OF JESUS* (1890): "The weak Hyrcanus (II), who had been installed in Palestine as 'Ethnarch' of the Jews, held the government only in name. This was exercised in reality by the crafty and active Antipater."

Unfortunately, no conclusion can yet be reached. You may choose between Antiochus VII, Alexander Zebina, Salome Alexandra, or Antipater... that's two Syrian Kings, a Judaeen Queen, or an Idumaeen. The solver of this mystery will certainly deserve an "A" for effort!



THE AUGUR'S WAND AND PONTIUS PILATE

The Lituus (commonly called the "augur's wand") can be found on a number of ancient Roman coins, either alone or with other priestly symbols. It appeared as the main feature of the small bronze coins of the Roman Procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, in the very year of the trial and execution of Jesus in 30 AD.

Two thousand years ago, before the Roman Emperor, or a Consul, or a General, or any government official would make a political decision . . . sign a treaty, go into battle, become betrothed . . . it had to be under the auspices of an augur—an ancient priest. Note that these words are still in common use with their original meanings virtually intact. Auspices is "A prophetic sign, generally favorable," according to the dictionary. Augur is "To predict the future especially from omens." And in light of the necessity of consulting with an augur, is it any wonder that the consecration of a new public official was and is still called an **inAUGURation**?

The augury priesthood continued until the end of the Fourth Century AD, having remained an important ancient institution for a thousand years. The augurs, who were appointed for life, maintained permanent observation posts at important public meeting places; it was forbidden to construct any new buildings that might interfere with their ceremonies. If the constitutional character of a public act was called into question, an unfavorable omen detected by the augur would cause the act to be immediately annulled. One can only wonder if the Procurator Pilate consulted with an augur before making his critical decisions.

The ancient "science" of Roman augury was based on the observation of the actions of birds. The procedure, based chiefly on written tradition, was as follows:

Immediately after midnight or at the dawn of the day on which the official act was to take place, the augur, in the presence of the magistrate, selected an elevated area with as wide a view as was obtainable. Taking his station here, he drew with his curved handled staff two straight lines cutting one another, one from north to south and the other east to west. Then to each of these straight lines he drew two parallel lines, thus forming a rectangle, which he consecrated according to a prescribed incantation. Here the augur sat and asked for a sign. Complete quiet, a clear sky, and an absence of wind were necessary conditions of the observation.

According to the Romans, signs on the left side were considered prosperous, signs on the right were unlucky—the east being the region of light (e.g. sunrise), the west of darkness. Certain birds like eagles and vultures gave signs by their manner of flying; ravens, owls and crows gave signs by their cries as well as their flight. There were also birds which were held sacred to particular gods, and the mere appearance of which was an omen of good or evil. The augur's report was expressed in the words "aves admitunt" ("the birds allow it") or "alio die" ("on another day"). The magistrate was bound by this decision.

Pontius Pilate ruled the Roman Province of Judaea from 26-36 A.D. The long period during which Pilate held office was due to the general principles on which Emperor Tiberius proceeded in his appointment of governors, procurators, etc. In the interest of the provinces, he left the governors at their posts as long as possible because he felt that governors acted like flies upon the body of a wounded animal; if once they were gorged, they would become more moderate in their exactions, whereas new men began their rapacious proceedings afresh. Indeed, the obscene behavior of the later Procurators of Judaea, who served short terms, bear out Tiberius' theory.



Some Procurators issued a multitude of coins, others issued none at all. Pilate issued no coins in his first few years, until 29/30 AD. We know this because all Procurator coins were dated. The ancient Romans naturally didn't use our method of dating, but generally dated their coins by the reignal year of the Emperor. Thus, Pilate dated his coins in the year of the reign of Tiberius, who ruled from 14-37 AD. The reignal year was indicated on Pilate's coins in Greek letters which were easily convertible into numerals as follows:

A(1), B(2), Γ(3), Δ(4), E(5), ς(6), Z(7), H(8), Θ(9), I(10), K(20), Λ(30), M(40); and so on.

Pilate's first coin was dated Ις (I = 10, ς = 6; representing the 16th year of the reign of Tiberius); it was not a typical Roman coin as no portrait—not of the Emperor nor a member of his royal family nor of the Procurator—was used. This was in the 150 year old tradition of Judaeen coinage which prohibited the portrayal of any person or animal in obedience of the first two Commandments, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" and "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth." Even while many of the Roman Procurators of Judaea, who ruled from 6-66 AD, were corrupt and outright thieves not one ever violated the Jewish Commandments against graven images; rather they portrayed plants and religious objects on the small bronze local coinage.

The earliest coins of Pilate featured three ears of barley on one side, along with the name of the Emperor's mother—Julia (ΙΟΥΛΙΑ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ). The other side has the Emperor's name (ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΥ ΚΑΙΣΑΡΟΣ), the date (Λ Ις), and an unusually shaped object that is generally thought to be a Simpilum. The simpilum was a ladle-shaped vessel made of earthenware; it was used both at the table and for sacrificial ceremonies. The first issue abruptly came to an end when Julia died in 29 AD. A new type was introduced in the following year dated ΙΖ = Year 17 (30/31 AD) which contained only the Emperor's name and the augur's wand, of which we have already spoken. This lituus type may have been suggested by the strong weakness Tiberius is known to have had for augurs and astrologers. The identical design appeared in the following year, dated ΙΗ = Year 18 and this was to be the last coin issued by Pilate.



The bronze coins struck by the Procurator Pontius Pilate (29-32 AD).

Christian sources are generally sympathetic to Pilate. This is in marked contrast to the description contained in a letter of Agrippa I (son of Herod the Great), who ruled Judaea briefly in 37 AD, again in 40 AD, and from 41-44 AD. This letter was published by the Jewish philosopher Philo (circa 20 BC to 50 AD). "Corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial, endless and intolerable cruelties," are charged against Pilate by his contemporary.

Luke wrote, "There were present at that season some that told Jesus of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." Another Biblical reference in Mark tells of "those who had made insurrection, and had committed murder in the insurrection." It was not until some thirty years later, after the terms of a number of corrupt Procurators far worse than Pilate, that the Jewish populace was able to mount a successful (for almost five years) revolt against their Roman oppressors.

But what was the fate of Pilate who had begun his rule by incurring the resentment of the Judaeans when he had entered the holy city of Jerusalem with Roman standards bearing the forbidden imperial image? His final undoing was the arrest, imprisonment and execution of a group of Samaritans who had gathered on their holy Mount Girizim in 35 AD to see the sacred utensils which had supposedly been buried since the time of Moses. They were led by one of the many pseudo-prophets of that time. This bloodletting was performed by Pilate under the guise of preventing a revolutionary uprising.

The Samaritans thereupon sent a delegation to Pilate's superior—the Governor of Syria—and soon to be Emperor of the Roman Empire, Vitellius. Vitellius ordered Pilate to Rome to account for his conduct to Emperor Tiberius, and appointed a new Procurator, Marcellus, in Pilate's place (obviously anticipating an adverse ruling). However, the Emperor died before Pilate reached Rome. Pilate never returned to Judaea. According to Christian tradition, Pilate either committed suicide or was executed by the Emperor of Rome.

(Reprinted courtesy of Coin Mart Magazine)



Pontius Pilate as portrayed in the 15th Century Book of Hours of Marguerite d'Orleans.

NUMISMATIC ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT



Famous Biblical "Tribute Penny" issued by the Roman Emperor Tiberius (14-37 AD). The Emperor's portrait is featured, along with his mother, Livia, seated on a throne.

This small classic by John Yonge Akerman is still an important reference. Published in 1846, it contains numerous descriptions that were originally written for an edition of the New Testament that was unfortunately abandoned.

We present an extract in explanation of Matthew 20:2, "And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard."

The penny here mentioned was the denarius, which, at the time of our Lord's ministry, was equivalent in value to about sevenpence half-penny of our money. With the decline of the Roman empire, the denarius was, by degrees, debased; and, before the time of Diocletian, had entirely disappeared, or, rather, had ceased to be struck in the imperial mints; but this emperor restored the coinage of silver, and denarii were again minted, though reduced in weight. This reduction went on after the division of the empire, until the denarius, once a very beautiful medalet, became a coin of very inferior execution, low relief, and reduced thickness and weight. On the model of these degenerated coins some of the types of our Anglo-Saxon money were struck, under the denomination of penny, and of the weight of twenty-four grains: hence the term "penny-weight." The weight of these pennies declined before the Norman Conquest; and, in subsequent reigns, they were gradually reduced until the time of Elizabeth, when the penny in silver was a mere spangle, as it is at this day. The term "denarius" is yet preserved in our notation of pounds, shillings, and pence, by £.s.d. The relative value of money in ancient and modern times is a subject of much difficulty of illustration, and need not be discussed here; but it is worthy of remark, that in this country a penny a day appears to have been the pay of a field labourer in the middle ages; while among the Romans the daily pay of a soldier was a denarius.

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